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Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 MOSCOW 02616 261528Z

62
ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 2616

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, UR, US
SUBJECT: DETENTE AND SOVIET SOCIETY: I. YOUTH

REF: MOSCOW A-88

1. SUMMARY: WE ARE UNDERTAKING A SERIES OF AIRGRAMS ANALYZING THE COMMITMENTS, PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF VARIOUS SEGMENTS OF SOVIET SOCIETY WITH REGARD TO THE PROCESS OF EAST-WEST DETENTE. WE HOPE THEREBY TO DEFINE MORE SHARPLY OUR KNOWLEDGE AND VIEWS OF SOVIET SOCIETY AND THE CHANGING INTERNAL ATMOSPHERE BROUGHT ABOUT BY SOVIET ESPOUSAL OF INTERNATIONAL DETENTE. WITH REGARD TO YOUTH, THE SOVIET REGIME HAS STRONGLY ESPOUSED DETENTE ON THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE, WHILE TRYING TO PROTECT ITS YOUTH FROM WESTERN INFLUENCE. TO A CERTAIN EXTENT, DETENTE HAS FED GROWING CYNICISM AND APOLITICAL ATTITUDES TOWARD PARTY PROPAGANDA AMONG YOUTH, BUT THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP PROBABLY FEELS THAT THIS SITUATION IS ACCEPTABLE WHEN COMPARED TO THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE POLICY TO THE COUNTRY. IN ANY CASE, THE BULK OF THE YOUNG POPULATION SEEMS POLITICALLY MALLEABLE AND SUBJECT TO PERSUASION AND MANIPULATION BY THE REGIME. HOWEVER, SOVIET YOUNG PEOPLE TEND TO ACCEPT DETENTE IN A POSITIVE WAY, AND PROLONGED EXPERIENCE WITH AN ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH THE "THREAT" FROM THE
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PAGE 02 MOSCOW 02616 261528Z

WEST IS ONLY DIMLY PERCEIVED IS BOUND TO CAUSE THEM TO VIEW

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS IN A WAY DIFFERENT FROM THEIR ELDERS. WHILE SUCH CHANGING ATTITUDES DO NOT MEAN THAT THE SOVIET SYSTEM WILL EVENTUALLY BECOME MORE COMPATIBLE WITH OUR OWN, WE DO BELIEVE THAT THE LONGER THE PROCESS OF MAKING DETENTE "IRREVERSIBLE" CONTINUES, THE MORE DIFFICULT IT WILL BE FOR ANY FUTURE SOVIET LEADERSHIP TO ATTEMPT TO REVERSE THE PROCESS. END SUMMARY.

2. WHILE EXHORTING YOUTH ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF DETENTE WITH THE WEST AND CALLING FOR THE GROUP'S UNANIMOUS SUPPORT, THE REGIME HAS ALSO TRIED TO MITIGATE THE EFFECTS OF THE PROCESS DOMESTICALLY THROUGH STRIDENT WARNINGS ABOUT IDEOLOGICAL SUBVERSION FROM THE WEST. DETENTE, PARTICULARLY IN ITS FACILITATION OF CONTACTS WITH FOREIGNERS AND ITS BROADENING OF THE AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION FROM AND ABOUT THE WEST, HAS PLAYED UPON FAVORABLE ATTITUDES AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE TOWARD WESTERN LIFESTYLES AND CULTURE. IT HAS ALSO PROBABLY IN-CREASED ALREADY STRONG FEELINGS OF CYNICISM AMONG YOUTH TOWARD PARTY PROPAGANDA PRONOUNCEMENTS. IN FACT, PARTY AND KOMSOMOL STATEMENTS REFLECT A GENERAL DEGREE OF CONCERN WITH CHANGING YOUTH ATTITUDES, APPARENTLY BASED ON THE PERCEPTION THAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE GROWING EVER MORE APOLITICAL, MORE CYNICAL AND LESS MOTIVATED BY COMMUNIST IDEALS SET BY THE OLDER GENERATION.

3. IN OUR ASSESSMENT OF SPECIFIC SUB-GROUPINGS OF YOUNG PEOPLE, WE FIND THAT THE YOUNG POLITICAL ELITE WHO SEE THEIR FUTURE IN THE PARTY AND OTHER RELATED ORGANIZATIONS SEEM TO SUPPORT THE DETENTE POLICY OF THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP AND, IN FACT, BENEFIT FROM IT MATERIALLY. BUT THEY ALSO ECHO THE CRITICISM OF THEIR ELDERS IN THE PARTY TOWARD WESTERN SOCIETY. SINCE THEIR EXPECTATIONS OF GAINING A LARGER SLICE OF THE POLITICAL-ECONOMIC PIE WOULD BE HIGH, NO MATTER WHAT THE INTERNATIONAL ATMOSPHERE, WE ESTIMATE THAT THEY WOULD NOT ONLY GO ALONG WITH, BUT WOULD ALSO LEAD THE WAY IF PARTY POLICY ON DETENTE WERE TO UNDERGO CHANGES. YOUNG, NON-POLITICAL ELITISTS, WHOSE ENTRY INTO THE SOVIET NEW CLASS IS SECURE, SEEM TO HAVE THE STRONGEST COMMITMENT TO THE POLICY OF DETENTE OF ALL YOUTH GROUPS. THEY HAVE THE MOST TO GAIN PERSONALLY AND PROFESSIONALLY IN TERMS OF ACCESS TO FOREIGN PRODUCTS AND CULTURE, CONTACTS WITH WESTERNERS, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, FOREIGN TRAVEL. NON-CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 MOSCOW 02616 261528Z

CONFORMIST YOUTH ALSO HAS AN OBVIOUS STAKE IN THE DETENTE PROCESS BECAUSE OF CHANGES IN THE DOMESTIC SITUATION WHICH ACT TO PROTECT THE GROUP'S INTERESTS. SIMILARLY, OUR CONTACTS AND OBSERVATIONS LEAD US TO BELIEVE THAT THE BULK OF THE YOUTH GROUP -- THE URBAN AND RURAL WORKING CLASS -- GENERALLY FAVOR DETENTE AND BETTER RELATIONS WITH THE WEST, BUT IN A RELATIVELY UNCOMPLICATED WAY. ALTHOUGH THIS GROUP VALUES SOME ASPECTS OF WESTERN CULTURE AND SEES SOME PERSONAL BENEFITS

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TO BE GAINED FROM DETENTE, WE FEEL THAT IT IS ON THE WHOLE POLITICALLY MALLEABLE AND SUBJECT TO PERSUASION BY THE REGIME WITH RESPECT TO ATTITUDES TO BE ADOPTED IN THE AREA OF FOREIGN POLICY.

4. ON BALANCE, WE BELIEVE THAT SOVIET YOUTH ACCEPTS AND SUPPORTS THE REGIME'S DETENTE POLICY IN A POSITIVE WAY, VALUING IT FOR THE MORE RELAXED DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN ATMOSPHERE IT HELPS TO PROMOTE. BUT DETENTE MAY CALL INTO QUESTION SOME OF THE TRADITIONAL SIMPLISTIC BELIEFS ABOUT THE SYSTEM ITSELF AND THIS COULD BE VIEWED AS A THREAT BY MORE IDEOLOGICALLY MOTIVATED PARTY LEADERS. WHILE WE DO NOT VIEW THE PROCESS AS THREATENING THE LEVERS OF CONTROL HELD BY THE PARTY, SOVIET LEADERS UNDOUBTEDLY SEE A HOST OF INTERNAL PROBLEMS ARISING FROM THE EXPOSURE OF YOUTH TO DETENTE WITH THE WEST. MOST PROBABLY FEEL, HOWEVER, THAT THESE PROBLEMS CAN BE KEPT UNDER CONTROL. THUS THE REGIME WILL CONTINUE TO GROPE FOR WAYS OF KEEPING YOUTH IN LINE IDEOLOGICALLY AND TO PROTECT IT FROM THE STRONG INFECTION OF FOREIGN INFLUENCE TO WHICH YOUNG PEOPLE -- MORE THAN ANY OTHER SEGMENT OF THE POPULATION -- ARE PRONE.

5. AS FOR THE FUTURE, PROLONGED CONTACT WITH THE ATMOSPHERE CREATED BY DETENTE IS BOUND TO HAVE ITS EFFECT INTERNALLY, ONCE THE PRESENT GENERATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE BECOMES MORE ESTABLISHED IN SOCIETY. IF DETENTE CONTINUES ALONG MUCH THE SAME PATH, THE VERY FACT THAT THEY WILL HAVE LIVED THROUGH A PERIOD IN WHICH THE "THREAT" FROM THE WEST IS ONLY DIMLY PERCEIVED -- IN CONTRAST WITH THE SITUATION OF THEIR ELDERS WHO EXPERIENCED THE REALITY OF BOTH HOT AND COLD WAR -- WILL UNDOUBTEDLY CAUSE THEM TO VIEW DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT. WE DO NOT THINK THAT THE ATTRACTION FOR THINGS WESTERN AMONG YOUTH OR FREER ACCESS TO WESTERN THOUGHT WILL INEVITABLY LEAD SOVIET SOVIET TOWARD A SYSTEM
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MORE COMPATIBLE WITH OUR OWN, AND WE DOUBT THAT MANY YOUNG PEOPLE EVEN NOW WOULD WANT TO RUN THE RISK OF OPEN COMPETITION AND THE FREE INTERPLAY OF IDEAS. WE DO BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT THE LONGER THE PROCESS OF MAKING DETENTE "IRREVERSIBLE" CONTINUES, THE MORE DIFFICULT IT WILL BE FOR ANY FUTURE SOVIET LEADERSHIP TO ATTEMPT TO REVERSE THE PROCESS.
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